United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1108
27 March 1992

FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is distressed by reports of "serious and ongoing" human rights violations in Yugoslav conflict.

+ Special Rapporteur on Human Rights reports continuing "massive human rights violations" in Iraq.

+ Private talks between United Nations and Iraqi delegation continue in Vienna on Iraqi oil sale.

+ Appeal for information on fate of British Journalist Alec Collett, who was kidnapped in Lebanon in 1985, renewed by United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

+ Preparatory Committee for 1993 World Conference on Human Rights to begin second session on Monday, 30 March, in Geneva.

+ Women are still not elected or appointed leaders despite international legislation on equality, says new United Nations study.

+ International Atomic Energy Agency invites Governments to adopt international nuclear event scale.

* * *

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, has deplored reports of serious and ongoing human rights violations on both sides of the Yugoslav conflict.

In a press release at Headquarters today, Mrs. Ogata said the UNHCR was making every effort to facilitate the voluntary return of the nearly one million people forced to flee from the civil strife. Civilians -- many of them women, children and elderly -- were being compelled to abandon their homes and seek security in other areas, some by force and others by

(more)

For information media—not an official record

intimidation or threat. The Office of the High Commissioner had appealed to all parties in the conflict to refrain from any action causing new displacement of the civilian population.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Committee, currently meeting in New York, has decided to ask Yugoslavia how the current crisis there has affected its international obligations to respect the rights recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Committee has been examining Yugoslavia's third periodic report on its compliance with the Covenant and will now ask for a specific description of the "flagrant violations of basic human rights" that have occurred during the recent military operations. Yugoslavia will also be asked to ensure that those rights are vouchsafed to "all individuals subject to its jurisdiction".

The Committee will further inquire as to what steps have already been or will be taken to investigate the violations, punish the culprits and avoid the recurrence of such acts.

* * *

The "massive violations of human rights" which continue in Iraq are so grave that, since the Second World War, "few parallels can be found", states Max van der Stoel in his new report on the human rights situation in Iraq. A national of Belgium, Mr. van der Stoel is the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rigths.

In his report to the President of the Security Council, dated 5 March, he says the volume of accumulated evidence, much of which he has collected himself, leads to the firm conclusion that the Government of Iraq has "systematically violated and continues to violate the international human rights obligations it has undertaken". The number of victims suffering from these violations, the Rapporteur continues, is in the hundreds of thousands at least. With respect to the Kurdish minority, he adds, there is reason for special alarm because there have been human rights violations directed against Kurdish people as such.

The Rapporteur recommends that a "broad-based human rights monitoring operation" be sent to Iraq, as soon as possible, until the human rights situation has drastically improved in that country.

He urges Iraq to set up a commission of inquiry into the fate of tens of thousands of disappeared persons and to take measures to end the widespread practice of torture. He also calls for a renewal of the negotiations on a "food for oil" formula and an end to the blockade of the Kurdish-controlled area of Iraq.

* * *

A United Nations spokesman announced today that the United Nations delegation, headed by Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs

(more)

Giandomenico Picco, and the Iraqi delegation, headed by Iraqi Permanent Representative to the United Nations Abdul Amir A. Al-Anbari, had continued their talks on Iraqi oil sale in Vienna today. Meetings would continue tomorrow, Saturday.

* * *

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has renewed its appeal for information about the fate of British journalist Alec Collett. Mr Collett was kidnapped in Lebanon while on a writing assignment for UNWRA seven years ago, on 25 March 1985.

Commissioner-General of UNRWA Ilter Turkmen said "that following the release of most of the Western hostages held in Lebanon, we hope to hear some definite news about Alec Collett in the near future".

Alec Collett was commissioned by UNRWA in 1985 to report on the situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon. Just before the completion of his assignment, he was abducted. In April 1986, his captors claimed that he had been killed and nothing further has been heard of him, despite numerous appeals by UNRWA and the United Nations.

* * *

The Preparatory Committee for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights will hold a second session beginning on Monday, 30 March, in Geneva. Proposals regarding the agenda, dates, and participation in the Conference will be discussed at the two-week meeting. No venue has been set for the 1993 Conference.

The high-level Conference will be convened in accordance with a General Assembly decision to review and assess the progress made in human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to identify obstacles to further progress in that area.

The Conference will also examine the relationship between development and the enjoyment by everyone of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, among other things.

* * *

Despite commonly accepted International legal norms which advocate the participation of women in decision-making, women are still not elected or appointed leaders, according to a new United Nations study. Entitled: Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late Twentieth Century, it says that nowhere in the field of women is the gap between equality by law and by practice so wide.

The Study focuses on women's participation in formal decision-making at the national level. Through the help of the case studies and by analyzing the similarities and differences between countries, the study examines why there

(more)

are only a few countries -- mainly those of the Nordic Group -- where the proportion of women in decision-making and thereby, their influence on public policy, is comparable with that of men.

Calling on women to put themselves forward as candidates for office, the study stresses that equality in political participation and decision-making is a priority for the 1990s, without which other areas of advancement of women would be put at risk.

* * *

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (NEA/OECD) have invited Governments to adopt a new scale for use in classifying incidents and accidents at nuclear power plants.

The scale, called the International Nuclear Event Scale (INES), went through a successful trial period in 1991. The INES scale was developed jointly by experts from IAEA and NEA/OECD to standardize the reporting of nuclear events world-wide and to facilitate communication among the nuclear community, the media and public. The scale categorizes events from level 0 for no safety significance, to level 7 for accidents with widespread health and environmental consequences. Under the scale, the Chernobyl accident was rated level 7 and the Three Mile Island accident was rated level 5.

* *** *